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AUSTRIA-HUNGARY AND SERBIA

BY 'GEORGE MACAULAY TREVELYAN

PRIOR to the outbreak of war singularly little was known in England or America about the Serbians and their quarrel with Austria-Hungary, and that little was chiefly derived from Austrian and Hungarian sources. Fortunately for the British people, circumstances threw them blindfold on to the just side of the quarrel in Southeastern Europe, as a consequence of their deliberate choice of the just side of the quarrel in North-western Europe. Yet even now the world does not sufficiently realize that the war against Austria-Hungary is a war of liberation, to free South Slavs (Croat and Serb) from tyranny quite as bad as any from which Finns and Poles have suffered in Russia and in Prussia.

Everything that there is to say against the Russian Government—and there is much to say against it—has for years past been told to England and America. But the wrongs of the nationalities of Austria-Hungary were unheard. The fact that these suffering races were branches of the Slav family prevented them from getting a fair hearing before the world. The prejudice against Slav peoples was a remarkable obsession which the events of the war have served to remove. Because one Slav *government*—namely, the Russian Government—was a bad government (though in fact no worse than the Hungarian or the German in its treatment of subject races), therefore all Slav *peoples* were regarded as barbarians. It seemed quite natural that seven million “barbarous” South Slavs should be subjected to the rule of “cultured” Germans from Vienna and “chivalrous” Magyars from Buda-Pesth. And if the Serbians over the border showed any desire to liberate their brothers of Bosnia and Croatia, they obtained none of the sympathy which the Piedmontese had obtained sixty years before, when they made themselves equally obnoxious to Austria on behalf of their brother Italians.

The present world-war was in its origin a "punitive expedition" against the Serbians, for having the impudence to sympathize with their brother Serbs and Croats in Austria-Hungary. The expedition was to have been made in August, 1913, as Signor Giolitti recently revealed to the world, but owing to Italy's refusal to join Austria in a war of aggression it was postponed for a year, until the murder of the Archduke by Austrian subjects seemed a fitting opportunity to wipe Serbia off the diplomatic map. The "punitive expedition" began in August last by the "chivalrous" Hungarians murdering two or three thousand men, women, and children of the "barbarous" Slavs near Shabatz and Losnitza. They burned a large number of the "barbarian" women and children alive and gouged out the eyes of others.¹ The Serbians have not taken any reprisals, and although they have captured 60,000 Austrian prisoners, those prisoners when questioned have no complaints to make of their treatment. The Austrian wounded are treated on an absolute equality with the Serbian in the Serbian hospitals. In this war Slav "barbarism" shows up very well against German "culture" and Magyar "chivalry." The case for keeping the South Slavs of Bosnia, Dalmatia, Croatia, and Slavonia subject to Austrians and Magyars on the ground of inferior civilization has completely broken down.

Until the various races of Austria-Hungary obtain political self-government and cultural liberty for their languages and schools, there will never be peace in Europe. There will always be assassinations, revolts, and finally wars. If a peace is patched up leaving the boundaries of Austria-Hungary intact and with no provision made for a radical change in the condition of Rumanians, Slovaks, Croats, and Serbs, within those boundaries, a fresh war will only be a question of years, even if every other European problem were satisfactorily solved. All the nationalist movements inside Austria-Hungary have been growing with great rapidity during the last half-dozen years, especially the movement drawing the Croats toward the Serbs, who speak the same language and are divided from them only

¹See Dr. Reiss's article in the *Revue de Paris*, April, 1915, and the Serbian official *Memorandum and Report*. The evidence in the *Memorandum* was taken on the spot, within a few days of the commission of the atrocities, by Dr. Arius von Tienhoven, of The Hague, Holland, and M. Jules Schmidt, Swiss engineer. Dr. Reiss, of Lausanne University, also took first-hand evidence, and has been lecturing on the atrocities, with photographs, in London and Lausanne. I gave some account of these atrocities in an article in the *Contemporary Review*, March, 1915, having been over the scene.

in religion. The reign of terror that has existed in these provinces ever since the war began has made it utterly impossible that the Austro-Hungarian rule can continue in the Slav and Rumanian provinces, except as the rule of the sword.

Some people ask why, if the subject races of Austria-Hungary are thus alienated from the Government, they do not now rise in insurrection. The answer is because *all* the young men are taken into the army by the modern system of military slavery, and *all* the leaders are in prison or exile. If that had been done in Italy and throughout Europe in March, 1848, there would have been no year of revolutions. The modern militarist organization makes revolutions impossible; for it is young men who rise in revolt—and *all* the young men are now drafted into the army, where the races keep watch over one another and military discipline renders mutiny the most hazardous and desperate act.

Yet even so, Austria's great military weakness in this war is the hatred of her subject populations, and the secret disloyalty of her soldier slaves. Large portions of her army are guarding other portions, or garrisoning disaffected districts. When they take the field, the unwilling conscripts fight well for a while—they can do no less unless they are ready to be shot—but they take the first opportunity to surrender. That is why the Serbians to-day have 60,000 prisoners, most of whom, so far as I could judge by their words and conduct, were only anxious not to be caught by the Austrians and made to fight again.

It is because she is not a nation that Austria-Hungary is so weak in war. Already she has failed to defend herself, and since the opening of the year 1915 she has been practically occupied by Kaiser Wilhelm's troops. It was the North Germans and Bavarians who came and saved Hungary, after the great defeat in Serbia last December; otherwise Hungary and probably Austria, too, would have been torn to pieces by an invasion of Russians and Rumanians coming over the Carpathian passes, which would probably have led to an Italian invasion as well. Hungary has become a vassal State, protected by Germany.

It is a mistake to think of Austria and Hungary, either singly or together, as a "nation" in the sense in which Russia, Germany, France, and England are nations. If we think so, we fail to understand one of the root causes of the present war. And when people suggest the restoration of the state of things

before the war as the basis for a permanent peace, they forget Austria-Hungary. The Empire of Vienna and Buda-Pesth is an anachronism, dependent now upon the Prussian arms. It is the domination of two races, the Austrian-Germans and the Magyars, over half a dozen other races.

Indeed, the present war arises quite as much out of the question of Austria-Hungary and its subject nationalities as it does out of the German ambition to dominate Europe. Even German love of domination would not alone have sufficed to set the whole world on fire had not German Culture been in alliance with a force equally regardless of the rights of others, the determination of the Magyars of Hungary to "Magyarize" the Rumanians, Slovaks, and Croats who dwelt within the borders of their State. In theory the law of 1868 gives cultural liberty to the Slavs in Hungary, but in practice this law is a dead letter. The whole government machinery is used to oppress any man who wishes to remain a Slav or a Rumanian, or to bring up his children as such. The policy of the Hungarian Premier, Count Tisza, represents this "will to oppress" on the part of the Magyars. The Magyars number only forty-five per cent. of the population of Hungary. And Count Tisza's policy is not even the policy of the Magyar nation, but of the Magyar oligarchy who deprive even their own race of all political power. This Magyar oligarchy has for years past been the dominant force in the Austro-Hungarian partnership. Buda-Pesth, knowing well what it wanted, has been able to dictate to the vacillating statesmanship of Vienna, which has had occasional hankerings after a more liberal treatment of the subject peoples. When the old Emperor Francis Joseph wanted to introduce universal suffrage throughout his wide dominions, he was prevented by the Magyar politicians, who saw in it the doom of their race ascendancy. Their treatment of the subject races of Hungary has become worse of recent years. In 1912 they abolished the Constitution of Croatia and seized the funds and charters of the Orthodox Serb Church in Hungary.

This internal tyranny has involved an aggressive foreign policy in the Balkans and toward Russia. For the tyranny exercised over the Croatian South Slavs in Hungary has involved as a corollary the repression of the Serbian South Slavs in Bosnia (the province abutting on Serbia, which is ruled by Austria and Hungary jointly). And the repression in Bosnia has in turn necessitated a hostile attitude on the part of Austria-Hungary toward Serbia. For Serbia and Bosnia are in reality

one country divided in half—a free half to the east, and an enslaved half to the west of the Drina River. Since oppression was the order of the day in Bosnia and Dalmatia, the oppressed peoples naturally looked across the Drina to their brothers of free Serbia, especially after Serbia had showed herself redoubtable in war against the Turks and the Bulgars in 1912–13. For the same reason it became more than ever essential to the Austrians to prevent the further development of Serbia, after her victory over the Turks, lest she should become the liberator of the South Slavs. Hence the fatal policy of Austria in making it a *casus belli* for all Europe if Serbia got a single port on the Adriatic. By Austrian decree the Serbians were condemned to remain for ever a bucolic, inland people, with no seaport, though half the eastern Adriatic coast is inhabited by their co-nationals, the South Slavs. Austria has “tied Serbia up in a sack,” as the Serbs say.

This artificial seclusion from the sea has been the bane of Serbia. The Austrians have cut her off from civilization and then called her uncivilized. She has been prevented from enjoying commercial and intellectual communication with the great European world, except by way of her enemy, Austria. She was shut in on all sides. No one visited Serbia, no one helped her to develop her resources, no one knew what manner of men inhabited her land. It was assumed that they were all “regicides,” dirty, idle keepers of pigs, as their enemies the Viennese reported. And, as so often happens, it is only their recent success in war which has at length caused the world to remark the qualities which they have always displayed in peace. As one of the few Englishmen who have visited Serbia both before and during the present war, I should like to record what the Serbians are really like.

The Serbians have the virtues and the limitations of a peasant democracy. Eighty-six per cent. of the population belong to the class of peasant proprietors, cultivating their own farms. There is no class of landlords taking rents. There is no feudalism, no squirearchy, and as yet no important mercantile or industrial classes—no “middle class” or “workingmen.” There are yeomen, and nothing else. The contrast is strange, as compared to neighboring Hungary, where the Magyars, one of the most feudal of all European races, sacrifice the wealth and happiness of the cultivating peasant to the landlord patrician, who carries off everything politically, socially, and economically. Serbia, on the other hand, is demo-

cratic and equalitarian, far more so than either America or England. There are no class questions, because there is practically only one class. Patriotism is the sole political feeling of the average Serbian, because there is no "social problem" and consequently there can be no politics except foreign politics. It is due to the independent manliness of the free yeomen, and to the absence of all class division, that the Serbian army has won redoubtable victories in the field over the larger forces that Austria-Hungary sent into Serbia on their errand of murder, pillage, and destruction. If ever there was a pure victory of freemen over slaves who had been sent by the tyrant to destroy them, it was the Serbian victory last December. A few talks with the poor Austrian prisoners, only too rejoiced to be out of the fighting and absolutely uninterested in the issues of the war, were enough to show why they had been beaten by the sturdy peasant soldiers of Serbia, united in one mood of heroism and devotion.

There are, however, defects as well as merits in this very pure form of democracy. There is no adequate class of men to lead the people. The administrators, politicians, and army officers are all peasants at one or two removes from the soil. The leading group is an improvisation. There is no inherited tradition of leadership and administration as in the class of gentlemen or merchants in the countries with which we are familiar. It has followed that, while the peasants have been living excellent and happy lives on their farms, the improvised politicians whom they elected as their political stewards have often made a terrible mess of Serbian politics. The regicide of 1903, a vile way of ending an intolerable state of things, was the culminating point of this mismanagement. Since then things have improved rapidly, especially since 1908, when the Austrian annexation of Bosnia aroused Serbians to a sense of reality, and caused a real moral and national revival. We have now in Serbia the rule of the excellent M. Passich, who is about as likely as President Wilson to have had a hand in the murder of the Archduke Ferdinand.

Of course not all Serbian administration is up to the standard of M. Passich. The standard of civil administration in Serbia is still very low, because, as I have said, there is no class with administrative traditions. This matters the less in ordinary times in Serbia, because the administrative needs of a simple peasant community are comparatively small. But now that the Serbians have to administer a large part of Macedonia,

won from the Turk and kept from the Bulgar in recent wars, the want of administrative experience is more serious. In Macedonia they have to govern not only fellow-Serbs, but people of different races and religions, Albanian, Turk, Bulgar, and Macedonian Slav. It is here that their deficiency in administrative experience comes out. If instead of ruling Macedonia they were united to their own co-nationals, the Serbs and Croats of Bosnia, Illyria, Croatia, and Slavonia, they would do much better. It would not be a question of governing the new provinces as a superior race, but of living side by side with their liberated brothers.

But the administrative weakness of the Serbians is much less marked in the army than in the civil service. The best elements among the improvised leaders go into the army. It is a very different service now from the army that supplied the regicides of 1903, and that suffered such easy defeat at the hands of the Bulgarians in 1885. The Turks in 1912, the Bulgarians in 1913, and the Austrians in 1914, each in turn failed to realize until it was too late how far army reform had recently gone in Serbia.

These officers, of whom the chief have been educated in the Paris military schools, strike one as men of superior quality, good at their profession, but modest and kindly. There is nothing of the Prussian officer about them in their relations to the men they command. They are brothers in arms, and men of one and the same class. The officer is in most cases only a peasant educated to command other peasants. The small civilian professional group—lawyers, doctors, clerks—is also found in the ranks of the officers in time of war.

The Serbian army is particularly strong in field artillery, not only having excellent Creusot guns, but having excellent gunners and artillery officers. The scientific manner in which they had dug out their lines of dry, covered trenches between Shabatz and Losnitza amazed me when I saw it; it was worthy of what we read of the engineering marvels of the Aisne and Ypres trenches. Also the soldiers' field huts of branches and turfs are cleverly made, dry inside both above and below, even in the wettest weather. Except in the dangerous moment last autumn when the supply of gun ammunition ran short at the base, ammunition and food always gets to the front in a way somewhat surprising to those who know the slackness of ordinary Balkan civil organization and railway service. The Serbian army, in fact, not merely contains some of the finest

fighting material in Europe, but is organized and led so as to give the valor of the private soldiers a chance. But by Western standards it is of course miserably clothed and equipped. Above all, its hospital arrangements are deficient, though even so they were not nearly as deficient as those of the Austrian army of invasion.

There is a great difference between Serbia proper and the Macedonian provinces which she has recently acquired down south. Serbian Macedonia contains many races, European and Asiatic, and is still rotten with all the vices of a country but just released from Turkish rule. The inhabitants dwell in gigantic villages of five or ten thousand people each, whence they ride out every morning to till the distant fields. In this their custom resembles that of many of the Sicilians and South Italians. Indeed, the bare limestone mountains and backward civilization of Macedonia are curiously like some parts of South Italy or Sicily. But the change from South Italy to North Italy is not greater than the change from Serbian Macedonia to Northern Serbia. In Northern Serbia, which has been free of the Turks for a hundred years and where the entire population is Serbian, you have a landscape of gentle, undulating, fertile hills, cut up into fields by hedges after the English pattern. It is much more like Devonshire or New England than like the typical scenery of the Balkans or Mediterranean. The white-walled, red-roofed farm-houses are scattered widely about this pleasant countryside, for there is no need for the inhabitants to draw together for safety at nightfall. It is this country, the richest in Serbia, that the Austrian troops sacked so ruthlessly during their invasion.

The Serbians are an emotional and mercurial people. The South Slav differs in many respects from the Russian Slav. He is less stolid, having been crossed with Greek and Italian blood, and modified by Italian influence in the course of the Middle Ages. Before the coming of the Turk, the Serbian Empire produced works of Italian art of high rank.

The Serbian peasant is not, like the Russian peasant, devoutly religious. He attends church very little, and he has not much of what we call "personal religion." He is neither clerical nor anti-clerical, but indifferent to his clergy. On the other hand, he is profoundly poetical, and his national songs about Kossovo and Marco Kraljevitich are the food on which his youth is fed. The background of his mind is occupied by the history and legend of his country, as handed down in this poetical and

musical form. The modern press and modern literature have not reached him.

The Serbs are less patient in retreat than the Russians, but capable of more fierce attack and of sudden recovery of *morale* after all is apparently lost. Their *retour offensif* against the Austrians in December, when they stopped their hasty retreat, turned round and attacked the pursuing enemy and broke him to pieces, is one of the most extraordinary feats in war, and is also highly illustrative of the mercurial character of Serbian heroism.

These national characteristics are also found still more strongly marked among the Croats of Dalmatia, of the same race and language as the Serbians, but of a different religion, being Roman Catholic, while the Serb is Orthodox. The Croats of Dalmatia, being a sea-going people, have had more to do with the Italians and the outside world than the Serbians ever had, and display their Slav characteristics modified by centuries of such contact. The Dalmatian Croats are subject to the Austrians, not to the Magyars. But the system of military terrorism has now spread from Croatia and Bosnia into Dalmatia. In all the South Slav provinces of Austria-Hungary during this war arbitrary imprisonment and executions are the order of the day, and in Bosnia the wholesale deportation of the inhabitants of suspected districts. It is useless for European statesmen to hope for permanent peace if these races, fully aroused to national consciousness during the last few years, are left to the tender mercies of Austrian and Magyar. So, too, with the Rumanians of Eastern Hungary and Transylvania. They are a Latin people, of fine sensibility and intellect, yet treated by their Magyar masters as if they were barbarians, unfit to have any share in government, and not even permitted the freedom of racial self-expression in education and literature. Consequently they are looking across the Carpathian border to their brothers of free Rumania. If ever there was a battle for freedom, there is such a battle now going on in Southeastern Europe against Austrian and Magyar. If this war ends in the overthrow of the Magyar tyranny, an immense step forward will have been taken toward racial liberty and European peace. Elsewhere we are fighting to prevent civilization from being put back by German military conquest; in the Southeast of Europe we are fighting for a positive improvement of the human lot.

GEORGE MACAULAY TREVELYAN.